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ABSTRACT

The dramatic rebirth of the foreign language department in a four-year liberal arts college is documented. The process is described as having three stages: assessment of the department's curricular mission in light of the changed student constituency; development of a long-range plan for outreach and public relations activities to prepare the way for complete revision of foreign language course offerings; and the drafting and implementation of a new program. Events and conditions leading up to the departmental crisis and program reorganization, the gathering of administrative support, the planning process, and the lessons learned from it are chronicled, and the integration of liberal arts principles into the program curriculum is described. The success of the effort is seen in the department's deliberate marshalling of support among colleagues in the expanding business and social sciences departments and in the productive alliances that have emerged from it. (MSE)

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THE MOUSE THAT ROARED: STRENGTHENING LIBERAL ARTS THROUGH
BUSINESS AND LANGUAGE ALLIANCES

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The Mouse That Roared: Strengthening Liberal Arts
Through Business and Language Alliances

The purpose of this paper is to document the successive stages of the dramatic rebirth of a foreign language department in a private four-year liberal arts institution. Rebirth occurred in three stages. The first crucial step for the department was to assess its curricular mission in light of a student constituency which had changed substantially since the early 70s. Secondly, based on a realistic review of institutional needs and operating under the aegis of an International Studies Committee composed of faculty from the humanities, business, and the social sciences, the department designed a long-range plan for outreach and public relations activities intended to prepare the way for a complete revision of foreign language course offerings. The final and most dynamic stage was the drafting and implementation of a new program in the fall of 1985.

In many ways the resuscitation of the Foreign Language Department at Elizabethtown closely parallels the well-contrived scheme of the tiny, faltering Duchy of Grand Fenwick in The Mouse That Roared to enlist the aid of the wealthy and powerful United States of America. Similarly, the beleaguered and severely understaffed Modern Language Department--consisting of only three full-time members (one each in Spanish, German and French with two adjunct faculty) had to marshal the support of colleagues in the vibrant and steadily expanding areas of business and the social sciences. Unlike the Duchess of Grand Fenwick who came to the conclusion that "there is no more profitable step for a nation without money or credit to take, than to declare war on the United States and suffer a total defeat," our department began to make itself heard through diplomatic means rather than armed conflict. Instead, the creation of strong alliances based on collaboration across disciplines provided the impetus for curricular change. These alliances

-2-

also produced a number of residual benefits like improved articulation of concerns among all faculty members.

Initially exchanges among the International Studies Committee faculty focused exclusively on the special needs of the Foreign Language Department. Ultimately, however, business and social science faculty came to realize that the revitalization of a Modern Language Department, firmly grounded in the liberal arts, was in everyone's best interest. Moreover, prolonged dialogue in meetings and strategy sessions engendered a reexamination of the importance of language study college wide.¹ Some faculty on this committee who were skeptical about the feasibility of a language requirement have changed their views. They now see the acquisition of a second language as both a pragmatic and humane skill.

In order to better appreciate the changes in both perspective and the curriculum, I would like to briefly outline the history of the department and to discuss the institutional realities which made the revitalization of this department look like such a challenge. Like many other liberal arts institutions Elizabethtown was in many ways a microcosm of the trends and priority shifts in the nation as well as the educational system in the 70s. The college experienced a dramatic rise in the number of technical and career majors and a parallel decline in liberal arts majors. The resulting imbalance in enrollments caused crippling reductions in foreign language department staff, facilities and programs. The Modern Language Department was cut from seven full-time members to three and the language lab was dismantled, put in storage and the room given over to a department in one of the pre-professional areas. The department, hard pressed to maintain a traditional language major, instituted two substantively weak options in 1974 and 1981. Because of inherent program weaknesses, the department continued to be

plagued by ever declining numbers of majors, attrition between fall and spring semesters and low morale.

Similarly, a decline of student interest in international education led to lower enrollments and the end of the African and Latin America Studies Programs. In short, the gap between liberal arts and professional and technical majors widened ominously.

Fortunately by the late 1970s a number of events coalesced favorably to set the stage for change. In 1977 a new President was chosen who had demonstrated a strong commitment to the liberal arts. More importantly for the Foreign Language Department, an International Studies Committee was formed at the request of the Dean of the Faculty with representatives from seven departments and a chair who combined charisma, leadership and a fanatical devotion to language and international studies.² The committee's mission was to assess college needs and to make recommendations based on those needs. One of the most urgent needs addressed by the committee, in an effort to stimulate grass roots support for foreign language and international studies, was the development of an International Studies Concentration. This concentration included a three course core requirement, a number of electives, and two language courses at the conversation/composition level. The committee also structured a campus wide International Education Graduation Requirement which students can satisfy by a number of courses from different disciplines, including the second semester of an intensive Fundamentals of Language and Culture course offered in French, German and Spanish.

From 1982 to 1984, the International Studies Committee began to closely examine the foreign language course offerings and undertook a statistical analysis of foreign language enrollments from 1979-84. The results were alarming to both humanists and members of other departments who felt a philosophical affinity to

to liberal arts values. The department had, on the average, only one major per year, enrollments were disconcertingly low in upper-level courses, and attrition between fall and spring semesters of consecutive courses was a significant problem over the five year period.

Moreover, the analysis pointed up the problem of attracting students, who because of rigorous demands of technical or pre-professional majors, may have only one or two electives in their entire college experience. It was obvious from surveys conducted among language students that many motivated students felt stymied by the structure of the curriculum. At this juncture foreign language faculty concluded that it would be imperative to revise and condense our elementary and intermediate language courses and to facilitate the completion of tape assignments by obtaining a state-of-the-art language laboratory.

Far from signaling total despair, the analysis also demonstrated some positive signs of change and renewed interest in foreign language study. From 1980-84, the number of students taking French doubled. In addition, the upsurge in foreign language enrollments nationwide was making itself felt in the Admissions Office. Admissions staff, the Registrar and many faculty advisors were beginning to report evidence of increased interest among students in both the intellectual and pragmatic benefits of language study.

In 1983-84 substantial institutional support provided the necessary foundation upon which to build a new curriculum. Funds for faculty development in foreign language and international studies became readily available. As the full-time professor of French, I received a grant to cover the tuition costs of a month-long business course offered by the Chambre de commerce et d'industrie of Paris. The college also helped to defray travel and lodging costs in order to insure my participation in first a tester and later a trainer workshop in oral proficiency testing procedures.

-5-

The arrival of a new Dean of the Faculty heralded a new age of strong support for the humanities in general and foreign language in particular. On behalf of the department he lobbied successfully for the purchase of a Tannberg language laboratory. It was installed in the summer of 1984. In the same year the Dean provided a small grant for the Spanish professor to attend this conference and to enroll in a two week course on oral proficiency testing at Middlebury College.

Most importantly, the administration agreed to match the funds awarded to a team of four faculty members from the International Studies Committee by the University of Pennsylvania/Pennsylvania Council on International Education.³ The grant provided for ten teams from Pennsylvania colleges and universities to participate in a four day institutional development workshop at the University of Pennsylvania. A number of distinguished consultants as well as prominent members of private sector companies and financial institutions were available to share their expertise and to provide valuable feedback to proposals for curricular design.

This was a crucial juncture for moving from the planning to the implementation of departmental strategies for change. As a result of the workshop foreign language faculty sharpened and refined their goals and formalized a plan to strengthen and revise course offerings with a view to attracting more business and technical majors as well as liberal arts majors. The Penn/PaCie grant included a campus visit in the fall of 1984 of Claire Gaudiani, a specialist in foreign language program design and management in higher education. Dr. Claire Gaudiani, of the University of Pennsylvania, served as an on-campus consultant to both the Modern Language Department and the Department of Business. She provided invaluable troubleshooting tips and made a major presentation to the faculty designed to generate enthusiasm about the link between foreign language and the business and

arts and science curriculum.⁴ Immediately after Dr. Gaudiani's visit, we planned a series of outreach activities designed to capitalize on the interest generated by her presentation.

In mapping out our public relation strategies we were forced to reconsider some of the painful lessons learned from the department's unhappy history. When retrenchment occurred in the department during the 70s many colleagues outside the department were dismayed by the reaction of foreign language faculty members. They offered no protests, no counter-proposals, no innovative suggestions for curricular redesign in order to save teaching positions or the language lab. In fact, they reacted as many humanities faculty have when faced with cuts of facilities and staff--they accepted the "inevitable." The lesson for a department like ours, which is determined to grow, and for other departments who wish to remain strong, is that organized, aggressive leadership is as essential for departments in the humanities as it is for businesses and financial institutions. Students and faculty will not inevitably come to appreciate the intrinsic value of our programs unless we make it a point to tell them.

With the help of self-assessment studies and an improved understanding of the needs and interests of our student constituency, we began to implement a number of outreach activities directed at students, colleagues, the administration and the community as a whole. Presentations on our proposed curricular revisions and new directions in foreign language teaching were made to professional conferences on the state level and to community organizations in local areas. In addition, an intensive lobbying effort was aimed at department chairs at the college. This last strategy was especially productive. Individual meetings with department chairs were informal exchanges designed to explain departmental objectives and solicit feedback. Chairs were requested to report back to their departments during their regular meetings. Later, a Modern Language departmental representative was

-7-

made available to attend these meetings or to answer questions. Taking the time to explain in this way made members of the college community feel as if they were part of the redesign process. I am personally convinced that this outreach effort of individual chairs helped to secure a faculty vote which was overwhelmingly in favor of the proposal to revise our curriculum when it was passed through the campus governance system in the spring of 1985.

Other public relation efforts included articles in the student newspaper and the alumni magazine as well as increased publicity of the varied activities of a revitalized Modern Language Club. In 1985 the club raised enough money through fundraising events to award modest cash stipends to language students planning to enroll in study abroad programs for the 1985-86 academic year. In 1986, students in the club used funds they earned to make a contribution to the Mexican Relief Fund in the wake of a devastating earthquake in Mexico City.

It is important to note that no program revision, however cleverly packaged and marketed to a college community, can or should gain approval if it is not well-conceived. We believe that our new program has enhanced academic integrity and will, at the same time, appeal to the pragmatic concerns of the student in the 1980s. The cornerstone of our new program is an intensive Fundamentals of Language and Culture course offered in French, German and Spanish, which stresses integrative or proficiency-based instruction and evaluation. It is a course which meets five days a week (1 contact period of fifty minutes) for two semesters.

In our view the aim of a proficiency or skill-based course is to prepare students to attain a clearly and specifically defined level of language competence and to measure their success in attaining that level by means of tests which have a high degree of content validity. In planning this course, we targeted the development of five skills in our goal statements but gave special attention to speaking

and writing. Therefore, at the end of the two-semester sequence, we intend to measure students' progress by administering proficiency tests in these two areas.

Fortunately the collaborative efforts of ACTFL, ETS and several government agencies have enabled the oral proficiency interview test to be used with a rating scale which was modified to reflect the realities of testing language students in high school and colleges. The oral proficiency testing procedure measures students' speaking ability with a high degree of reliability. It is, moreover, based on standards which are uniformly applied and nationally recognized.

Another skill which has received increased attention nationwide in recent years is writing. We subscribe to the belief that writing well and thinking well go together. Frequent writing assignments, which stress a process not product orientation, not only produce more proficient writers but at the same time develop higher cognitive skills such as the ability to organize, analyze, synthesize, etc. For this reason students in this two semester course and throughout the foreign language curriculum write frequently and have ample opportunity to revise and improve their work. In the Fundamentals course all students write 6-7 compositions per term and take chapter examinations that include written portions equivalent to 30% of the whole. One half of the final exam is devoted to writing several themes.

Although there is no proficiency exit requirement at the conclusion of the second semester of the Fundamentals course, an overall objective for speaking ability is the achievement of a minimum proficiency level of Intermediate Mid on the ACTFL scale. Students are not required to take the oral proficiency interview test, but are strongly encouraged to do so because upper-level language courses are only open to students who have achieved a rating of Intermediate Mid on this test. In this way we hope to use the test as an incentive to continue language

study at more advanced levels and to underscore the necessity of working diligently toward achieving a well-defined level of communicative competence in the first and critical year of language study. At this point, approximately 3/4 of our language students have indicated their intention to take the oral proficiency test at the conclusion of the term.

Providing students with proficiency-based instruction necessitates specialized pedagogical techniques. These strategies should aim to simulate real-life situations and to develop linguistic accuracy without sacrificing creative use of the language. In the proficiency-oriented classroom, perhaps 20-30% of classtime is devoted to paired or small group activities which promote interactive communication. Nurturing proficiency skills does not have to mean lessening the importance of grammar and drill sessions or sacrificing a concurrent study of culture. The importance of these components is heightened and reinforced for students when they have regular opportunities to attempt meaningful exchanges in the target language.

The benefits we have observed even at this point are numerous and noteworthy. First, there is a renaissance of interest in language study campus-wide. The nagging problem of attrition between semesters has completely disappeared in all three languages. In fact, there were waiting lists for enrollment in the French and Spanish sections of the Fundamentals course fall semester and in French sections spring semester.

Students are requesting additional foreign language related activities outside the classroom such as field trips, foreign films etc. Most importantly, students in the fall semester course registered a high degree of satisfaction with the course on written evaluations given in early December. They generally felt good about the course content and instruction and expressed confidence in their ability to master

the material. These positive feelings are being translated into a dramatic increase in study abroad applications over previous years. In addition, growing numbers of students are making the commitment to pursue language study for its humanistic benefits or as a vital ancillary skill developed by completing a minor in foreign language.

The newly created foreign language minor was designed to build upon the foundation of the Fundamentals course and to provide a cluster of focused language courses attractive to both liberal arts and business or technical majors. The minor we have created has two critical objectives. The first is a pragmatic one which seeks to serve the increasing demand in industry and the professions for people competent in more than one linguistic and cultural setting. It is imperative for students to achieve more sophisticated levels of speaking proficiency in order to be able to function credibly on the job. That is, students must be able to go beyond an exchange of simple amenities or cocktail party conversation. They must be able to handle confidently informal conversations about their lives, families, current events and to conduct routine, uncomplicated professional duties in the language. To underscore the necessity of achieving a limited professional competence in the language, all minors must take the oral proficiency interview test and receive a rating of Advanced on the ACTFL scale.

The second and equally important objective involves the humane values which characterize liberal learning. It is to develop a critical perspective on the movement of ideas and on the forces which shape cultural identity throughout history. To achieve these objectives, the minor requires a minimum of 12 credits in the following courses:

I. 211 Oral Expression (Fr, Ge, Sp) 3 Credits

This course emphasizes expanded functional proficiency with particular attention to the speaking and listening skills. Students study selected

-11-

contemporary texts organized according to a number of cultural themes. In addition, the syllabus allows for progression through essential language functions presented in a variety of culturally authentic contexts.

II. 212 Textual Analysis and Composition (Fr, Ge, Sp) 3 Credits

This course is presented as a writing workshop stressing the development of higher cognitive skills as well as the skills needed for good expository writing. Students are actively involved in the editing and revising of their work. There is concurrent study of advanced grammatical structures and selected prose and poetry masterpieces.

III. 311 Making of Modern Society (Fr, Ge, Sp) 3 Credits

Instead of the chronological progression of the traditional civilization course, students analyze important contemporary cultural phenomena which are organized thematically (centralization, industrialization, class structure, education, etc.). By tracing the origins of current institutions, values, and attitudes, students will gain a perspective on the historical and cultural forces which shaped the nation.

Students have a choice of either 312 or 323:

IV. 312 Languages for the Professions - 3 Credits

A. Commercial French

This course provides practical training in French business practices and a knowledge of the essential vocabulary and style specific to business communication. Of equal importance is acquiring an understanding of the structure and basic workings of French business and industry within the context of the society as a whole.

B. Spanish for the Health Professions

This course offers practical and authentic Spanish relevant to the medical and social services. It also presents cultural attitudes, behaviors and beliefs regarding health care issues that may influence the service to the Hispanic client.

V. 323 Introduction to Literature (Fr, Ge, Sp) 3 Credits

This course is designed to introduce selected readings representative of different literary genres and epochs. Enhancement of students' critical thinking abilities through numerous writing assignments is an important goal in this course.

The minor includes optional participation in a foreign internship experience for credit. As a result of an agreement concluded with Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Coordinator of Foreign Language Study and Internship Abroad, Dr. Victor Drescher, selected, highly competitive students of French and Spanish from Elizabethtown may complete an internship relating to their major field of study. The coordinator has a well-established network of contacts in France and Spain. Placements are made with a wide variety of organizations in both the public and private sectors such as airlines, banks, news agencies, government offices, private schools, etc.

Finally, because of the proficiency exit requirement and the availability of foreign internship placements, students who minor in foreign language are strongly urged to combine their coursework with a study abroad experience. Elizabethtown is part of a six college consortium which supports the Brethren Colleges Abroad Program. Students have the option of choosing a semester or full year abroad. Given the rigorous demands of certain technical majors, however, even a semester abroad is often out of the question. In cases like this, we urge students to consider intensive summer courses in France, Spain or Germany.

Finally, advising students about which options to exercise within the framework of a discipline, a department or an institution is a sensitive and critical task. Students often hear conflicting reports on the feasibility of certain career choices depending on where they go to get advice.

Our advisees in 1985 are looking ahead to career paths in the 21st century at a time when the world is increasingly interdependent economically and politically. Unfortunately, the emergence of a global economy has not been accompanied by a reduction of mistrust, intolerance or conflict among nations. It is obvious that man has made unparelled advances in developing new technologies without being able to master himself. Since these truths are unlikely to change, who, then, has the best chance of succeeding in the next century? We believe it is necessary to form graduates who have learned facts and developed technical expertise without sacrificing a comparable insight into values. That is to say, graduates who combine a professional preparation with a solid grounding in language, culture and the liberal arts.

In conclusion, properly advising and guiding our students means first improving communication and better articulating the fears and concerns we as faculty harbor within and across disciplines. Insuring that fruitful exchanges continue on a regular basis among faculty in different areas can be an arduous task. At Elizabethtown, the alliances that were formed in a time of urgency have blossomed into relationships that have endured and even extended beyond the confines of the International Studies Committee. The benefits of these collaborative efforts have helped to breathe new life and confidence into a department which was, like the Grand Duchy of Fenwick, on the road to extinction. With each daring roar, the mouse has grown in size and stature. As of this writing, the department has a small but committed group of majors and is attracting students to the minor from pre-professional and liberal arts majors in impressive numbers.

Notes

1. Currently only B.A. students are required to take two semesters of foreign language. Language is, nonetheless, an important component of some technical and pre-professional concentrations. Similarly, Elizabethtown now has an International Studies minor which includes two upper-level language courses and has a proficiency exit requirement of Intermediate High on the ACTFL scale.
2. Dr. Wayne Selcher, Chair of the Political Science Department and Director of International Studies. An internationally recognized expert on Brazil, Dr. Selcher speaks Portuguese and Spanish fluently.
3. The team included Dr. Wayne Selcher; Dr. Jay Buffenmeyer, Chair of Business Department; Dr. William Puffenberger, Professor of Religion and Philosophy; Mrs. Susan Terrio, Instructor of French, Modern Language Department.
4. To stimulate interest in the presentation and encourage greater attendance, we had two student assistants send formal handwritten invitations to all department chairs and administrators. We announced that the department was entirely revising its curriculum in light of exciting new trends in the profession.